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ABSTRACT

Boards of education and professional educators have been charged with the responsibility for being accountable for the educational dollars. This involves designing and utilizing a model of accountability that would focus on staff development whereby each individual is cognizant of his assignment, areas that need improvement, and assured assistance from leadership in a constructive manner. Evaluation procedures should be approached with caution, all persons affected by the program should be involved, and sensitivity to the welfare of the individual should be stressed. (Author/MLF)

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"HOW TO EVALUATE TEACHERS ON PERFORMANCE"

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National School Boards Association

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HOW TO EVALUATE TEACHERS ON PERFORMANCE

Total Personnel Involvement - The Key to Developing Sound Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

It is of great importance that the topic of evaluation of personnel be presented to decision-makers in education - the board members. Considerable concern has been reflected by the lay public regarding educators' ability to be accountable for expenditures of funds received through taxation.

Performance evaluation basically is designed to fulfill needs of educators who choose to be accountable for the performance of individuals under contract to the board of education. This process received its beginning in the public schools of Cincinnati, Ohio, in the late fifties, and has spread extensively across this nation. From the outset, the focus has been on the instructional staff, however, one of the inconsistencies is that evaluation for educational leaders has not received equal attention. A reasonable assumption regarding improvement of the educational process hinges upon the ability of leaders to screen and select competent personnel and to provide a constructive staff development program.

Performance evaluation has gained considerable impetus since the accountability clamor began, however, accountability is not new in the field of education. As early as 1915, the N.E.A. President described instructional evaluation as demeaning, artificial, arbitrary, and perfunctory, and reflected grave concern that evaluation focused upon the instructional staff only. A half century later, N.E.A. President, Helen Wise, stated, "I taught fifteen years and was observed only three times. I would assume that I am an excellent teacher, however, I have not positive or negative feedback regarding my performance." If the educative process is to progress in a constructive manner, there is necessity for leadership to designate curriculum revision and design and staff development as top priorities.

Recently, Albert Shanker, President of the United Federation of Teachers, stated that accountability is nothing more than an exercise in blame-placing whereby teachers are the scapegoats of all educational and societal shortcomings. Realistically, educators have assumed many of the responsibilities for developing the child which rightfully belong to parents, however, professional educators can not negate their responsibility of being accountable for the learning process of the child as well as other expenditures in education. To quote Victor Hugo, "No army can withstand the strength of an idea whose time has come." Accountability is here for educators. Wasn't it Omar Khayyam who spoke about

"the brave beat of a distant drum"? In a general sense, the accountability call of the distant drum wins our approval. But, when it becomes specific, beating at the door of our school system, we sing a different song. It has no right to invade our district!

A major challenge for board members is to cautiously and carefully assure citizens of our country that they as decision-makers, as well as personnel under their employ, are capable of designing and utilizing a model of accountability which will verify the quality of education within a given school district. Such a model would focus upon staff development whereby each individual is cognizant of his assignment, areas which need improvement, and assured assistance from leadership in a constructive manner. If performance evaluation is to be more than an inspectional process of questionable value, it must include all personnel involved in the learning process.

EVALUATION TRENDS IN OUR NATION

Inflationary conditions in our country are greatly reflected in the educational profession. Pressure is being brought to bear upon leadership to intelligently reflect priorities regarding educational expenditures, new processes for acquiring funds, and to realistically reflect to the public that their tax dollar is being utilized in an equitable manner.

Legislators in a number of states have responded by drafting mandates requiring that evaluation models be developed which will assist them in reflecting to their constituents an accounting of utilization of the educational dollar. States which have drafted such mandates are California, Florida, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington, Kansas, and Ohio.

Other states such as Hawaii, Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky have affected the same results through initiative of leadership in the State Departments of Education. Arizona, Pennsylvania, and Nevada typify states that are considering other forms of mandated evaluation. More extensive action in the evaluation movement is inevitable as the accountability demand is accelerated.

Attention should be called to the fact that exacting processes of evaluation are not normally specified in the mandates, and therefore, varied approaches are being utilized from state to state. State departments are to be commended for providing constructive assistance in developing models, however, the effectiveness of any model parallels the objectives and/or needs of local school districts with viable input from those directly affected.

CLIMATE

Quality of the educational program provided the client (learner) is greatly affected by educational climate within the school district. It is set either positively or negatively, intentionally or unintentionally, by representatives of the board of education and the educational leader (superintendent).

If the personnel of a school district is to accept the challenge of being accountable for their performance, it is a necessity that the designed model start with decision-makers (board members) and superintendent, and be progressively implemented throughout the staff. It is not unreasonable to expect elected representatives of the public to intelligently, with assistance from the educational leadership, design an educational assessment which reflects the present status of education in a community and to parallel short and long range goals of the board of education with the educational needs of the school district. The superintendent's goals should parallel the priorities as formulated from the needs assessment study of the local educational needs. The educational climate is highly complimented when informed, involved, knowledgeable representatives of the board of education communicate the efforts of the educational family in a positive manner to the lay citizenry. Staff morale is greatly enhanced when the superintendent, supportive personnel, and mid-management (principal) function within the same evaluative guidelines as the rest of the personnel. Systemwide goals set by the superintendent and board of education establish the broad perimeter within which all staff goals and objectives are formulated.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO CHANGE

Personnel evaluation has moved through a number of steps, beginning with the traditional rating scales where staff members were labeled strong, average, weak, or unsatisfactory. In many cases, dismissals followed a process of "shock treatment", whereby the individual was notified just prior to the mandated dismissal date. Decisions were made on personal opinions without documentation or justification.

Other factors which have moved us from a traditional approach regarding evaluation to a more constructive effort are: 1) administrative qualifications whereby the criteria utilized for selecting leadership are certification and community pressure, excluding humanistic elements such as the ability to communicate, to command respect, to set a positive educational climate, and to facilitate program initiation, design, and implementation; 2) promotions which have been based on insubstantial recommendations (fraternalism, friendship, etc.); 3) innovative trends have furthered our frustration in the area of evaluation

since many of the new programs and philosophies regarding innovative organizational procedures require varied teaching and administrative techniques, and often demand limited managerial responsibilities for team leaders, curriculum directors and other supportive personnel; 4) The behavioral pattern of classroom teachers changes when the assignment and management of non-certificated staff are added to the responsibilities. Alleviation of lesser responsibilities which have normally been a part of teachers' job descriptions challenges the instructor to more specifically structure priority order regarding dissemination of efforts and utilization of skills.

Professional educators have been stimulated to search for new techniques of personnel evaluation. Recent designs of evaluation call for specific performance objectives, involvement of all professional staff, utilization of a self-analysis, and a thorough procedure for measurement of individual growth and documentation substantiating the employee's efforts.

DEVELOPMENTAL PROCEDURES OF A PERFORMANCE EVALUATION PROGRAM

Negativism has been reflected regarding the instructional staff's views of an evaluation process. Obviously, teachers have been disillusioned regarding existing rating systems. A measurable amount of concern, as well as the shadow of threat, with limited potential of instructional improvement, has been the focal point of past models. Therefore, development of new evaluative procedures should be approached with caution, involvement of all persons affected by the program, and sensitivity to the welfare of the individual.

Where the climate is positive, leadership is progressive, and fundamental educational objectives designed by decision-makers are aimed toward the welfare of the learner and staff personnel. Evaluation instruments are formulated as an outgrowth of a representative professional committee, with the focal point being staff development which enhances the learning process.

School districts which have utilized model programs for individual buildings and/or segments of staffs before implementation for the entire school system have eliminated costly errors and capitalized upon research which should be conducted during the experimental period.

A critical issue in the actual acceptance of a model on a long range basis has centered around quality of in-service and ability of the evaluation committee to communicate accurately, consistently, and intelligently the positive as well as the marginal aspects of the program to the staff and community.

ROLES OF INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED IN THE EVALUATION PROCESS

In viewing the roles of those involved in the actual process of evaluation, it is important that we analyze and accept responsibility and preparation of the evaluator regardless of the level at which the evaluation is being conducted. It is not realistic to expect a building principal in our modern schools where staffs may number in excess of one hundred to be the evaluator and/or an expert in all given areas. Yet, it is realistic that the diagnostician and expediter (principal) in each building be responsible for making evaluation assignments whereby team leaders, department chairmen, curriculum coordinators, supervisors, and assistant principals can be assigned according to their area of expertise. The evaluation process gains extensive credence or credibility when personnel is aware of the evaluator's in-depth capabilities in areas in which job targets are being designed. This process adheres to the concept of broadening the base of the management team, thereby allowing a substantial portion of the staff to be evaluated on an annual basis.

Contradictory to the philosophy held by supervisors and instructional specialists regarding their role in staff development, it is essential for their expertise to be an integral part of the evaluation design. The in-depth knowledge and talent which these supportive staff members possess far outweigh the concern of jeopardizing rapport with staff.

In viewing the evaluatee's role, it is imperative that the individual is cognizant of job expectations (job description), procedures to be followed in target accomplishment, design of a measurement process, timetable, schedule of observational and follow-up visits, data-gathering process, mid-year and final target conferences.

TARGETS

The philosophy of evaluation by objectives centers around the concept of self-analysis as well as a continuous, cooperative experience between the evaluator and evaluatee whereby the individual has major input into his professional growth, identification of strengths and weaknesses, and the design of targets which will constructively move him toward his optimum level of performance.

A positive aspect of performance evaluation centers around isolation of individual targets, thereby, in reality, accepting the philosophy that the monumental task of evaluating the total educational process as a whole is not realistic. No one should be held accountable for improving all categories of education simultaneously. The design of targets is the responsibility of the evaluatee and evaluator jointly, and may be taken from numerous broad area criteria such as managerial skills, curriculum revision and design,

communication, etc. Caution must be exercised in selecting goals which are harmonious with the board of education philosophy and policy.

Targets should encourage behavioral change in the identified areas and correlate the evaluatee's and evaluator's philosophies, expertise, and efforts as relevant to the needs of the individual being evaluated.

A strength of performance objective evaluation is an opportunity for the individual to compete with himself. It is inappropriate to use evaluation to compare one teacher's performance with that of another. It is preferable to help teachers identify strengths and needs and design performance objectives which will serve in a constructive manner, therefore enhancing the individual's performance whereby he becomes a better instructor this year than he was last.

Performance evaluation is not a panacea; many have expected the impossible from this process. Its focus is not for the accumulation of documentation which will justify the release of marginal and unsatisfactory personnel; it is not designed as a process of instituting differential pay; it can not be reasonably expected to fully answer the public's clamor for accountability.

Performance evaluation, basically, is a process of staff development whereby the individual becomes knowledgeable of expectations regarding his performance. He is stimulated, through self-analysis and a systematic program, to move constructively toward a higher level of efficiency.

RESULTS WHICH CAN BE EXPECTED FROM PERFORMANCE EVALUATION PROGRAMS

Dr. George Redfern, nationally known evaluator and Executive Vice President of the Institute for Leadership Achievement, lists several results which can be expected from performance evaluation programs in our schools.

1. Clearer perception of performance expectations

   Unless employees understand what is expected of them, they can not wisely determine where efforts should be concentiated to bring about both qualitative and quantitative improvement in performance.

2. Use of feedback to refine performance strategies and procedures

   Periodic progress evaluations throughout the year are used to modify teaching procedures, to alter where necessary the performance objectives, and to discard malfunctional targets and replace them with more relevant ones.

3. Availability of more valid performance data

These data enable both evaluatee and evaluator to more accurately assess the degree of target accomplishment and professional growth.

4. A team effort toward educational improvement

This process brings the educational family into proper perspective and stresses a unified approach to performance improvement, stressing intra-staff relationships and verifying the concept that no educator fails alone.

5. A greater sensitivity and acceptance as to individual needs of students

The welfare of the student-client is paramount. The performance objective approach to staff development focuses upon development of self-discipline, encouraging systematic planning and establishment of priorities as to utilization of skills and time.

6. Emphasis upon positive approach to staff development

It is in the best interest of the individual being evaluated, the students served, and the school system's program to put emphasis upon greater practitioner proficiency.

7. Adequate documentation of dimensions of incompetency

It is not always possible to avoid the necessity of documenting dimensions of inadequacy or incompetency. This type of evaluation stresses the importance of early specification of deficiencies in performance plus careful and adequate administrative and supervisory assistance to help the individual overcome deficiencies. Carefully kept records of help provided, data monitored, results achieved, etc. become documentation that is necessary if and when due process procedures have to be carried out.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the total educational family is accountable for the educative process which is presented to young people in our schools. This responsibility can not be transferred from one level to another. To quote Admiral Rickover, "Responsibility is a unique concept. It may be shared with others, but your portion is not diminished. You may delegate it, but it is still with you. You may disclaim it, but you cannot divest yourself of it. Even if you do not recognize it or admit its presence, you can not escape it. If responsibility is rightfully yours, no evasion or ignorance, or passing the blame can shift the burden on someone else."

. . . Boards of education and professional educators have been charged with the responsibility of being accountable for the educational dollar. Certainly, the area of personnel warrants serious consideration.

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April, 1975